



SENATOR

Mary Margaret Haugen

E-Newsletter - 10th District

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10th Legislative District

January 22, 2009

I've submitted the following letter to the South Whidbey Record to clarify some inaccurate information that was recently published on their Editorial Page. I am sending this to make sure that it's available to as many of my constituents as possible via the internet. Please feel free to email me directly at haugen.marymargaret@leg.wa.gov or call my office at 360 786-7618 if you have any questions or comments.

FERRY FACTS

Everyone knows that there are financial problems with Washington State Ferries, and that an overhaul of their operating and financing is necessary. At a time when funding for all transportation projects in our state is limited and alternatives like tolling are being implemented on major highway projects, we also need to look at how we can make Washington State Ferries more efficient.

Part of that involves the current review of Washington State Ferries' recently released Draft Long-Range Plan.

Whatever you may have heard about Washington State Ferries' (WSF) Draft Long-Range Plan or a reservation system for the Clinton/Mukilteo route, I can make you one guarantee — it's not a done deal.

No matter whom you heard it from or where you read it — if they said “reservations are a done deal” or “reduced services are a done deal” or “no back-up boats are a done deal,” they are not giving you accurate information.

That's because there is no such thing as a “done deal” until the votes are counted and a bill is signed into law — and we're a long way from that happening with anything contained in the WSF Draft Long-Range Plan.

It's called a “draft” for a reason — it's preliminary, and it has a long way to go before any of it becomes a reality.

The Draft Long-Range Plan is currently in the very early phase of public comment that occurs before any legislative action is taken, and the simple fact is that neither ‘Plan A’ nor ‘Plan B’ is likely to be accepted as is.

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Many of the people who have attended the meetings hosted by Washington State Ferries all over the Puget Sound have some serious issues with the Draft Long-Range Plan, and so do I and many of my colleagues in the Legislature.

I appreciate those of you who have attended these meetings, and the comments and suggestions that my constituents have offered me. That is the single most important tool I have as a legislator, and the people in my district provide me with key points in the decision-making process of me and my colleagues.

In the meantime, there are a few things that I would like you to consider.

Rumors

A recent guest column in the South Whidbey Record suggested that constituents contact me because I had “voted in favor of a reservation system.”

I value hearing from my constituents. But I think that the writers Paulette Becker and Paul Thompson, as well as the newspaper itself — which failed to verify any of the content of the editorial — did our community a great disservice by providing many pieces of information that were completely false.

To make it clear, I have not “voted in favor of a reservation system.” No one has even drafted or sponsored a piece of legislation concerning a reservation system, and there isn’t likely to be one suggested anytime soon since the Washington State Ferries’ Draft Long-Range Plan is still in the public comments phase. And most important, nothing in the Draft Long-Range Plan is a “done deal.” We still have a lot of work to do before we approve anything regarding ferries.

Reservations

The possibility of using a reservation system is being studied, since this can be a more cost-effective alternative to increasing the size of vehicle holding areas to prevent waiting vehicles from clogging local streets near ferry terminals. The legislature and WSF are still exploring options on whether there will be a new reservation system added on any of the runs at all, how reservations would be made, whether there is a deposit required, etc. There is still a lot of work and research to do to determine if this is feasible for the Clinton/Mukilteo route. If this reservation system is approved, I will work with the ferry system and the residents who rely on this ferry to ensure that the needs of commuters, residents and tourists are met.

However, I am adamant that any reservation system must include two minimum requirements.

- ? First, no ferry run should ever be 100 percent reservation-based! There always needs to be some “space available” set aside for drive-ups.
- ? Second, reservation systems must be tailored to suit the needs of each route – and even adjusted seasonally on those routes. Keystone-Port Townsend has different needs than Kingston-Edmonds or Bainbridge-Seattle, and any reservation system would need to reflect that.

I’m also adamant that any reservation system be technologically nimble and cost effective. The Puget Sound region is the home of some of the best technology and internet entrepreneurs in the world, so we know we have the talent to get this done. We also know that many private businesses have on-line reservations systems are cost effective; if we do adopt a reservation system, I’ll make sure that our tax dollars get us the system we need at a price that makes sense.

Elimination of Service

No one — not the Assistant Secretary of Washington State Ferries, not the Secretary of Transportation, not even the Governor — can single handedly eliminate a ferry route. By law, a vote of the Legislature is required for that to happen, and I can assure you that I plan on doing everything in my power to ensure that that doesn't happen on my watch.

Our system of representative government depends on a well-informed constituency and legislators who are willing to listen to their concerns.

I invite everyone to make themselves as informed as they can, and to offer me their suggestions — attend public meetings and legislative hearings on the issues you care about, and let me know what you think.

The Washington State Ferries' Draft Long-Range Plan is available online at http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/News/2008/12/DraftLRP_121908.htm

The agenda and bills being considered by the Senate Transportation Committee are available on our website at <http://www.leg.wa.gov/Senate/Committees/TRAN/> and hearings can usually be seen on cable television or online at www.tvw.org

Thank you for reading my email newsletter. I appreciate your interest in the legislative process. If at any time you decide you no longer wish to receive updates from me, please go to <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/subscriptions/member.aspx?member=haugenm> to remove your name from the list.

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